

Uniting Stakeholders With A Purpose Beyond Profit: A Case Study Of A Commercial Sport Organization

Gwartz, Evan; Spence, Kirsty

Brock University, Canada

E-mail: eg10eo@brocku.ca

Aim of the research

Mackey and Sisodia (2013) suggest that a leader's strongest strategic resource for influencing organizational performance lies with an understanding of 'why the organization exists' (i.e., organizational purpose) and the core values that unite organizational stakeholders. In the sport management literature however, many have suggested that further understanding both the purpose and core values that unite sport organizational stakeholders would constitute areas of potential development among scholars and practitioners. Zeigler (2007) illustrates existing ambiguity among sport scholars towards the purpose and core values of sport organizations by asking pivotal questions including: "what are we really promoting, and do we know why we are doing it?" (p. 298) and "what evidence do we have that sport as a social institution is really making a positive contribution to society?" (p. 297). Further, Newman (2014) asserts that sport management scholars and practitioners have become disconnected from the field's original purpose of serving social good, given the common assumption that sport currently exists "principally as a commercial activity" (p. 604). From such queries, the purpose of this research is to explore the strategic management of purpose and core values by leaders of a commercial sport organization, and addresses the following two questions: (1) what purpose do leaders of a commercial sport organization espouse that engages their stakeholders, if any?; and (2) what management practices do leaders use to strategically utilize this purpose in the organization, if any?

Literature review

To guide the current exploration of organizational purpose and core values, the following literature serves as a theoretical framework. First, Mackey and Sisodia (2013) outline four types of organizational purpose that can further clarify 'why an organization exists' including: (1) the Good' (i.e., service to others); (2) 'the True' (i.e., effort to further knowledge); (3) 'the Beautiful' (i.e., the creation of excellence); and (4) 'the Heroic' (i.e., the pursuit of what is 'right'). Further, Dolan and Garcia (2002) explain that organizational leaders can strategically manage core values by using them as rallying points to align stakeholders and engage them in the organization's purpose. While studying leaders of national sport organizations however, Bell-Laroche, Maclean, Thibault and Wolfe (2014) found that organizational leaders vary in their capacity to strategically manage values. These scholars introduce the 4-I Values Framework as a tool to describe how an organizational leader manages values at any of these following levels, including: Inactive, Intuitive, Institutional or Inspirational. These aforementioned frameworks guide this study by providing operational definitions of organizational purpose and core values, as well as describing how researchers and practitioners can strategically reflect upon a leader's management of both organizational purpose and core values.

Data collection and analysis

A qualitative, single-site case study was conducted to further fulfill on this study's purpose. A private, for-profit sport organization that fields a professional team in one of the world's highest attended domestic sport leagues (i.e., average attendance of 24,000 spectators) served as the research case site. Data collection strategies included semi-structured interviews with employees from different organizational levels and departments of the business operations staff (n = 13), observation of physical artifacts in the organization's office building, and analysis of organizational documents. These data were analyzed using NVivo software; specifically, the researcher utilized a 2-stage coding process by: 1) reducing these data to descriptive codes; and 2) by organizing these data into groups that represent the ways in which the researcher observed the organizational purpose and the management of core values within the research site. The researcher compared the groups of codes to Mackey and Sisodia's (2013) typology of organizational purpose and Bell-Laroche et al.'s (2014) 4-I Values Framework to analyze the purpose espoused by organizational stakeholders and the practices organizational leaders utilized to strategically manage this purpose in this commercial sport organization.

Results and discussion

As data analysis is currently in progress at the time of this abstract submission, results of this research are not yet available; however, such results will be outlined and discussed at the time of the EASM presentation. It is expected that findings from this descriptive case study will illuminate the organizational purpose

espoused by organizational stakeholders, as well as identifying the level at which organizational leaders were strategically managing core values. Specifically, the findings may contribute to sport management literature by providing an answer to the elusive query of 'why does a commercial sport organization exist?' Furthermore, this research may support sport organizational leaders and practitioners by discussing opportunities to strategically utilize organizational purpose and core values to engage, unite and inspire their organizational stakeholders.

References

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